

CHAPTER II

ELDERLY NUTRITION DEMONSTRATIONS

The Elderly Nutrition Demonstrations were designed to test not only the three separate models but also the various operational alternatives within each model. As a result, the six demonstrations differed in their respective approaches to encouraging FSP participation among the elderly, including where clients were served, the types of outreach employed, use of paid staff or volunteers, and whether technology was a key part of the demonstration (Table II.1). The demonstrations also differed in both the types of challenges they faced and their experiences in reaching the elderly population.

In examining the different experiences of the demonstration sites, two characteristics emerge as particularly important in understanding the effectiveness of the demonstrations:

1. ***Outreach.*** Outreach efforts—defined as those activities used to promote the demonstration—varied from site to site but remained an important component of each demonstration. The demonstrations were designed to measure the impact of changes to application procedures and FSP benefits—not the impact of outreach. Nevertheless, for the demonstrations to attract more clients to the FSP, they needed an effective means of communicating the program changes to potential clients.
2. ***Staff effectiveness.*** The extent to which demonstration staff were both dedicated and innovative was reflected in how the demonstrations evolved. Most staff were committed to reaching as many seniors as possible, and they developed creative solutions to problems that arose. In the instances where staff were less effective, the demonstrations were less successful.

The remainder of this chapter discusses the demonstrations individually, explaining the operations of each, and identifying key challenges and successful strategies.¹ The analysis is based

¹ Nogales et al. (2005) provides more details on each of the demonstration sites, including a full description of demonstration procedures, a discussion of the roles of key stakeholders, a summary of the design and development process, and a more complete description of the various challenges and successes.

Table II.1: Comparison of Design Components of the Elderly Nutrition Demonstrations

Design Components	Simplified Eligibility	Application Assistance			Commodity Alternative Benefit	
	Florida	Arizona	Maine	Michigan	Connecticut	N. Carolina
Households eligible for demonstration	Pure elderly households ^a (FSP-only applications)	All households with elderly	All households with elderly	All households with elderly	Pure elderly households	Pure elderly households
Eligibility interviews	Waived	Waived	Waived	Waived	Not waived	Not waived
Key outreach strategies	Public service announcement, brochures, bus posters	Community presentations	Door-to-door canvassing, community presentations	Community presentations, promotional mailings, radio announcements, bus posters	Promotional mailings, community presentations, radio announcements	Caseworker referrals, community presentations
Use of technology	Prescreening at call center	Laptops for on-site eligibility screening	None	Web-based FSP application	None	None
Assistance locations/ commodity distribution sites	Clients apply from home (assistance not provided)	Senior centers, food assistance sites, libraries	Primarily in-home	Senior centers, senior housing, churches	Congregate meal sites (some home delivery)	Central warehouse (some home delivery)
Prescreening of clients	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Type of assistants	n.a.	Paid senior workers (10)	Paid senior workers (3)	Volunteers – mostly seniors (38)	n.a.	n.a.

^aPure elderly households are households in which all members are elderly.

n.a. = not applicable for demonstration.

on (1) direct observations of program operations by Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) staff; (2) interviews with demonstration staff, FSP caseworkers, local community organizations, and—in some cases—elderly FSP participants; and (3) reviews of planning documents and progress reports prepared by the demonstrations. Senior MPR staff conducted at least two observation visits to each demonstration site.

FLORIDA: SIMPLIFIED FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY FOR ELDERLY

Summary: Florida's Simplified Food Stamp Eligibility for Elderly

Dates of operation	February 2002 through December 2003
Demonstration model	Simplified Eligibility
Grantee	Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF)
Other Major Partners	Florida Impact
Location	Leon County (includes Tallahassee) and Gadsden County
Eligibility	"Pure" elderly households applying for food stamp benefits only

Under this demonstration, program officials implemented several changes to make applying for food stamps easier for the elderly. Applicants did not have to submit documentation of income and expenses (although proof of citizenship was still required). Under demonstration rules, all elderly applicants were exempted from the eligibility interview, and all eligible seniors were granted a year-long certification instead of three or six months. Demonstration outreach referred potential clients to a telephone call center, where they were prescreened for eligibility and informed of the simplified eligibility rules. While not technically part of the demonstration, the agency also implemented a one-page, large-typeface application that collected only data relevant to seniors.

The Florida Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) was the only grantee that designed and implemented a simplified eligibility demonstration. The demonstration was implemented in Leon and Gadsden Counties, both of which are located in the panhandle of the state. Leon County is home to the state capital, Tallahassee, and Gadsden County is a more rural county adjacent to Leon County. The key feature of the Florida demonstration was that elderly residents of these counties did not need to provide documentation for assets, earned income, and expenses. The demonstration included a large outreach effort to promote participation among seniors.

Operational Details

Prior to the demonstration, seniors who applied for food stamps in Leon and Gadsden counties were required to complete a two-page application and conduct an eligibility interview with a DCF caseworker. Seniors were required to provide documentation of income, expenses, vehicle ownership, and financial assets as part of the application process. Typically, seniors made two trips to the local DCF office when applying for food stamps—

once to submit the application and once to participate in the eligibility interview. Three or more trips were required if the client needed to return with supplemental documentation.

The demonstration made several changes to regular FSP procedures for seniors applying for food stamps, including:

- **Most documentation requirements eliminated.** Seniors were not required to submit documentation of income (for example, earnings records and Social Security payments), deductions (for example, medical bills and proof of shelter expense) and assets (for example, ownership of vehicles). DCF verified the applicant's Social Security Number, along with some income amounts, using existing databases. Applicants still had to provide proof of citizenship.
- **No eligibility interview.** DCF waived the interview to determine eligibility for elderly applicants, although caseworkers contacted applicants by telephone or mail if any relevant information was missing from the application, or if clarification was needed.
- **12-month certification.** All participating seniors received a one-year certification, as opposed to three or six months. Face-to-face interviews for recertifying seniors were waived. If necessary, information was clarified by telephone.
- **One-page application.** To facilitate the simplified eligibility demonstration, state officials developed a short, one-page application that only recorded data relevant to the elderly population. This application included large typeface and had more space for entering information.²

Under the simplified eligibility rules, caseworkers spent significantly less time processing each application. Caseworkers estimated that, prior to the demonstration, applications from elderly clients took them between 60 to 90 minutes to process, with a significant portion of time consumed by the eligibility interview. Caseworkers estimated that the time needed under the demonstration was reduced to between 15 and 25 minutes per application.

² Because the shortened application form was part of the application assistance model and not the simplified eligibility model, USDA requested that the shorter form be used in two comparison counties (Alachua and Jackson counties) to test whether impacts could be attributed in part to the shortened form. The eligibility rules in those counties were not changed. As discussed in Chapter III, there is little evidence that the shortened application influenced participation patterns in Alachua and Jackson counties.

Outreach Activities

The most notable outreach effort was a public service announcement that aired on television for a total of 12 weeks during three separate periods in the second year of the demonstration.³ The announcement featured the Secretary of the Florida DCF explaining that low income individuals over age 60 could be eligible for food assistance and showed footage of an elderly woman using her EBT card. The Secretary indicated that seniors eligible for the food assistance program would receive a “food security card.” The announcement provided a telephone number for information on the demonstration. Elderly Gadsden and Leon County residents who called this number were prescreened over the telephone for eligibility and benefits and, upon request, were sent the one-page FSP application.⁴ (Elderly residents from other counties that viewed the announcement and called the information line also were prescreened for eligibility, and then directed to their local DCF if they were interested in applying for benefits.)

The public service announcement generated a significant interest in the FSP. Call center staff as well as DCF caseworkers cited large increases in inquiries from the elderly during each airing period for the announcement. Interviews with other organizations that served the elderly and with seniors participating in the FSP provided further evidence that the public service announcement was viewed by many seniors and that it generated significant interest in the FSP. The program coordinator remarked that the announcement was an effective way to reach seniors who lived in rural regions, and that seniors liked the idea of calling from the privacy of their own homes.

In addition to the public service announcement, demonstration staff distributed more than 14,000 information fliers and almost 300 promotional posters to seniors and to community organizations that served the elderly. These promotional materials encouraged seniors to apply for food assistance and provided the telephone number to the same call center referenced in the public service announcement. In response to calls or as part of promotional events, demonstration staff estimated that they distributed more than 14,000 one-page applications.

The information call center (which was established prior to the demonstration) was managed and staffed by a contracting organization (Florida Impact), not by DCF directly. As a result, seniors could apply for benefits with minimal or no direct contact with DCF.

³ The announcement was aired on a major network affiliate. The three television airing periods were: (1) March 24 through May 11, 2003, (2) July 28 through August 26, 2003, and (3) October 20 through October 27, 2003.

⁴ The prescreening tool was developed by Florida Impact for DCF under a previous contract.

Challenging Issues and Effective Strategies

The demonstration encountered some challenges in implementing the simplified eligibility model. The challenges were surmountable, and the effects on the demonstration seem to have been minimal.

1. ***Simplification applied to FSP-only applicants.*** When income-eligible seniors in the demonstration counties applied for other assistance programs, such as Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), at the same time they applied for food stamps, they needed to apply through the routine procedures for those other programs. Since applicants would need to provide verification documentation and attend in-person interviews, the overall process of applying for social service programs was not simplified for this subgroup. Still, DCF staff believed that only a small percentage of seniors submitted joint applications.
2. ***Communication Problems.*** Communication between the state and other key stakeholders of the demonstration was problematic at times. Some local DCF staff said they were informed of the demonstration at the last minute, and not all staff had a complete understanding of the simplified eligibility rules. Indeed, some officials speculated that the public service announcement—which was not aired until the second year of the demonstration—also helped to raise awareness about the simplified rules among DCF caseworkers. While the impact of these communication gaps probably was minor, it is possible that more seniors would have encountered a streamlined application process if demonstration procedures had been communicated more effectively to front-line staff.

On the whole, stakeholders involved in the demonstration thought that the fundamental structure of the simplified eligibility program was a success, because it directly addressed key participation barriers facing the elderly. Specifically, the demonstration's procedures eliminated much of the paperwork burden, as well as the requirement of traveling to the DCF office for in-person eligibility and recertification interviews (potentially multiple trips). By avoiding the need to see their caseworkers in person, seniors saved time and transportation costs, and could apply for food stamps from the privacy of their homes.

One expected challenge for the demonstration that never actually materialized was the accuracy of information provided by clients. At the start of the demonstration, local DCF staff expressed concerns about possibly miscalculating benefit amounts if seniors misreported income and expense information.⁵ By the end of the demonstration, however,

⁵As part of the demonstration, Florida was granted a waiver from USDA that excluded pure elderly FSP households in the demonstration counties from the food stamp Quality Control (QC) process. As a result, any benefit miscalculations were not counted towards the state's payment error rate.

DCF staff were no longer concerned about this issue. Caseworkers reported anecdotally that the income data provided on applications matched the amounts recorded in the agency's databases, and the rents reported generally coincided with market averages. Nevertheless, it is possible that if this model had operated for a longer period of time, or if it had been expanded beyond demonstration status, some clients would have discovered that misreporting information could lead to a larger benefit.

ARIZONA: FOOD ASSISTANCE AND NUTRITION FOR SENIORS (FANS)

Summary: Arizona's Food Assistance and Nutrition for Seniors (FANS)

Dates of operation	September 2002 through April 2005
Demonstration model	Application Assistance
Grantee	Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES)
Location	Pinal and Yavapai Counties
Eligibility	FSP-eligible households with one or more seniors

Application assistants delivered services to seniors predominantly at senior centers and food assistance organizations; other locations included churches, libraries, and health departments. A small percentage of FANS clients received application assistance through home visits. Application assistance typically was conducted by appointment, and clients were informed in advance about which documents they should bring. FANS assistants used a prescreening tool to estimate clients' benefits. They then read the applications verbatim to clients, filling in responses on their behalf. Assistants hand-delivered the printed applications to the local DES office within one business day of their completion. The eligibility interview with a DES caseworker was waived for applicants served by a FANS assistant.

The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) was one of three grantees that implemented the application assistance demonstration model. The Food Assistance and Nutrition for Seniors (FANS) demonstration was implemented in two counties: Pinal County, located to the south of Phoenix, and Yavapai County, located to the north of Phoenix. Both counties are large and rural. FANS application assistants prescreened interested seniors for potential food stamp eligibility and helped them complete the FSP application.

Operational Details

Under the demonstration, application assistants provided one-on-one aid to seniors interested in applying for food stamps. This program used application assistants that were age 50 or older to facilitate strong connections between the assistant and the client. During an application assistance session, the FANS assistant read through the FSP application and asked the applicant all questions verbatim. The assistant typically completed the application

on behalf of the client. Assistants then photocopied the applicant's documentation, either using copiers located on site, at a nearby store or library, or by taking the paperwork to the DES office. After the food stamps portion of the interview was completed, FANS assistants informed the client about other social services for which they might be eligible, including alternative food assistance programs such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). Staff occasionally helped seniors complete these other forms.

Generally, application assistance sessions were conducted by appointment. In a typical scenario, a senior expressed interest in the FANS program, either in person during an outreach event, or by calling program staff. At that point, the FANS assistant prescreened the senior for eligibility and estimated a benefit amount using a laptop equipped with specialized prescreening software. (If there was not enough time to prescreen at that point, the prescreening occurred later, during the interview.) The assistant then scheduled an interview with the senior and informed the senior about any documentation they needed to bring.

Once the application was completed and signed by the client, application assistants hand-delivered the paperwork to the local DES office within one day of completing the application.⁶ With a few exceptions, there was usually no further contact between the FANS application assistants and the clients once the paperwork was submitted.⁷ DES caseworkers worked directly with clients to resolve any issues and request further information. However, the eligibility interview with a DES caseworker was waived for applicants using the FANS program.

Application assistants held their one-on-one meetings with clients at a range of locations across Pinal and Yavapai counties. Senior centers and food assistance organizations were typical places at which the elderly could access FANS services. Other sites included churches, libraries, health departments, and a firehouse. For a few towns in Yavapai County, service delivery occasionally took place at the local DES office. Some sites offered private spaces that afforded client confidentiality, such as a conference room or office. At other locations, however, application assistants had to improvise, such as using a table at one end of a large common area.

The FANS assistants were hired through the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), a federal program aimed at finding part-time employment for low-income seniors. The SCSEP screened job applicants, monitored their activities on a quarterly basis, and regularly reviewed their timesheets. DES also helped supervise the assistants, with DES

⁶ In cases where the applicant did not bring all required documentation, the FANS assistant completed an Information Request Form that listed which items clients needed to send to DES, explaining that they had 10 business days to submit the documentation.

⁷ The FANS application assistants also helped clients who needed to recertify—reminding them of the deadline, helping them fill out the forms if needed, and collecting and submitting the paperwork.

office directors signing their time sheets and caseworkers being available to address any questions or concerns that the assistants had.

For seniors who were not applying for food stamps through FANS, the process began with the senior obtaining an application from a DES office—either in person or having one sent by mail or fax. Arizona uses a combined application through which clients apply for food stamps, general assistance, cash assistance, and the state health insurance program. Seniors submit the completed application via proxy, mail, fax, or in person, and then conduct an eligibility interview with a DES caseworker. If determined eligible for food stamps, seniors are photographed for an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card, select and activate a password, and must be finger-imaged. Staff estimate that once DES receives an application, the eligibility determination process can take 1 to 15 days, depending on the accuracy and completeness of the submitted documentation.

In the initial months of the demonstration, seniors applying through FANS still had to go to the local DES office to be photographed and finger-imaged, and to activate their passwords and EBT cards. This requirement was dropped in 2003 when FANS applicants were granted an exemption for good cause⁷ from the finger-imaging and photograph requirements. After this change, local DES supervisors could activate an EBT card and mail it to the client's home in a sealed envelope.

Outreach Activities

Identifying potential clients was a central challenge of the FANS program. Many residents were geographically isolated, and there were not many public spaces or service providers through which staff could reach seniors. The FANS outreach strategy relied on the application assistants to promote the demonstration in communities. Key outreach efforts included:

- Maintaining a regular presence at various FANS assistance sites (for example, senior centers and CSFP sites) to distribute brochures, explain the demonstration, and prescreen interested seniors for eligibility and benefits
- Making presentations to various community organizations (for example, senior centers, county advisory meetings, hospitals, health fairs, churches, senior housing complexes)
- Staffing promotional tables during community events
- Displaying posters at locations frequented by the elderly (for example, senior centers, grocery stores, post offices, libraries, CSFP distribution sites, and farmers' markets)
- Including brochures in Meals on Wheels packages and county water bills
- Developing press releases and getting local news coverage

Challenging Issues and Effective Strategies

The challenges facing the FANS demonstration existed primarily in Pinal County, and were primarily related to the availability and skills of the application assistants. The FANS program had 10 positions for application assistants, five of which were for Pinal County. Problems in Pinal County were manifested in four ways:

1. ***Hiring Application Assistants.*** The FANS project struggled with hiring application assistants because only a limited number of seniors were willing to take these jobs. The shortage of staff was more problematic in Pinal County, where two of the five positions were never filled for any significant amount of time. In both counties, local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) staff and senior center directors, who were interviewed as part of the evaluation, suggested three reasons for the small pool of potential assistants. First, they suspected that seniors worried that they would lose some or all of their public assistance benefits if they worked. Second, seniors may have been anxious about using the laptop computers. Finally, they speculated that seniors were apprehensive about taking jobs with a lot of responsibility, dealing with paperwork, and interacting with clients.
2. ***Retaining Application Assistants.*** Over the course of the demonstration, there were eight assistants who either left the program or were hired but did not start. Staff left for a variety of reasons, including personal (death in family, illness) and work-related issues (position too stressful, termination for performance).
3. ***Varying Skill Levels of Application Assistants.*** The effectiveness of application assistants varied considerably. Some assistants were effective at promoting the program, making strong connections with clients and building strong relationships with DES caseworkers. Other assistants were more introverted, could not connect well with clients, and did little to promote the program. The staff in Pinal County generally were viewed as less effective than the staff in Yavapai County.
4. ***Outreach.*** Due in part to staffing shortages and staff personalities, outreach efforts were less effective in Pinal County than in Yavapai County. Outreach was never extended into the outlying service areas of Pinal County, and two towns in Pinal County received only minimal outreach efforts. Evidence of these outreach problems included the fact that several local organizations that serve seniors in Pinal County had limited awareness of the FANS program.

These four challenges were interrelated. The lack of available staff, combined with unanticipated high turnover, necessitated the hiring of assistants who were not well-suited for their positions. This, in turn reduced the quality of services provided by the program and led to limited outreach in some areas.

The demonstration faced other challenges as well. The vast scope of the geographic area covered by the demonstration in both counties (approximately 13,500 square miles) made it difficult for application assistants to create a regular presence in remote rural areas, and for the project coordinator to provide extensive oversight of the application assistants. Another challenge was the lack of privacy in some settings where assistance was provided. FANS staff sensed that seniors were sometimes uncomfortable applying for food stamps and sharing personal information in front of friends and acquaintances in senior centers, libraries, and other public locations.

Despite these challenges, the demonstration also experienced several successes. First, FANS applicants seemed to enroll in the FSP faster and receive benefits sooner than if they had applied on their own—most likely because they did not have to wait for the next available eligibility interview appointment.⁸ Caseworkers in certain regions estimated that non-demonstration applicants waited three weeks to two months for their food stamp benefits to be activated (even though federal regulations require applications to be processed within 30 days). Another successful outcome of the demonstration was that it reduced the workload of DES caseworkers. FANS applications generally were complete and required little follow-up from caseworkers, although this was more often the case in Yavapai County. Additionally, caseworkers did not need to interview clients who submitted applications through FANS, saving additional time. Finally, there is anecdotal evidence that application assistants helped seniors better document their household expenses, and this may have enabled more seniors to qualify for the FSP and receive higher benefit levels.

⁸ The implementation of the FANS demonstration coincided with a state hiring freeze and higher caseloads, which led to slower application processing for non-FANS applicants.

MAINE: FOOD ASSISTANCE CONNECTING ELIGIBLE SENIORS (FACES)

Summary: Maine's Food Assistance Connecting Eligible Seniors (FACES)

Dates of operation	February 2002 to February 2004
Demonstration model	Application Assistance
Grantee	Maine Department of Human Services (DHS)
Other Major Partners	Waldo County Committee for Social Action (WCCSA)
Location	Waldo County
Eligibility	FSP-eligible households with one or more seniors

Application assistants worked one-on-one with low-income seniors to enroll them in a host of programs including, but not limited to, the FSP. Potential clients were identified through door-to-door canvassing and referrals. Assistance typically was provided in clients' homes. Assistants explained the various assistance programs available, helped seniors complete the relevant applications, and helped them assemble the correct documentation. Even after applications were submitted, the assistants frequently performed other follow-up activities. The three application assistants were themselves low-income elderly individuals.

The Food Assistance Connecting Eligible Seniors (FACES) program also implemented the application assistance demonstration model. The program was administered by a small number of staff and served the predominantly rural and coastal Waldo County in central Maine. Three application assistants—who were themselves low-income seniors—guided senior clients through the process of applying for food stamps, usually in the privacy of their homes. A defining characteristic of the FACES program was that it provided seniors with access to more than just the FSP; assistants also helped seniors enroll in other programs, such as the state's Medicare buy-in program and the state's pharmaceutical assistance program.

Operational Details

Most application assistance sessions took place in clients' homes. Application assistants began each session by engaging the client in conversation, both as a way of identifying the particular needs of the client and as a means of establishing trust. The assistant then described the various programs for which the senior might be eligible, including, but not limited to, the FSP.⁹ The assistant asked basic questions to gauge whether the client was

⁹The full list of programs to which seniors could be referred included Medicaid, Medicare buy-in, Maine Care (pharmaceutical program), the Low Income Home Energy

likely to be eligible for food stamps, although no formal prescreening was conducted, and encouraged the individual to apply for as many of the programs as appeared relevant to their situation.

For purposes of completing the FSP application, the assistant first asked the senior to assemble the necessary supporting documentation, such as utility bills and Social Security payment receipts. Next, the application assistant walked the client through the application and helped the client complete it. The assistants worked from a checklist to ensure that nothing was overlooked; a copy of the checklist was left with the client. This initial visit typically lasted between one and two and a half hours.

After the home visit, the application assistants performed other services, if needed, before submitting the FSP application. For example, they gathered copies of receipts or bills from pharmacies, doctor's offices, or the water company. This helped eliminate the burden to clients of obtaining this paperwork, and it helped accurately document expenses (particularly medical expenses). Once the application was completed and the necessary documentation assembled, the program coordinator conducted a review of each application, checking for accuracy. The coordinator then faxed the application to the local DHS office and mailed the hard copy with supporting documentation. Food stamp benefits were set retroactive to the date when clients signed the application, as opposed to when it arrived at DHS. This policy ensured that clients were not penalized for using application assistants, as opposed to submitting the application in person. Moreover, it gained two to three days of benefits for individuals who would have mailed their applications had they not had the help of the application assistants.

Application assistants often provided other follow-up services as well. For example, the assistants delivered fresh, donated produce; ran errands such as picking up prescriptions; or ensured that seniors could access emergency food assistance until their FSP benefits became activated. During the first year of the demonstration, FACES staff commonly called or visited each senior at least once each month, developing a strong rapport with their clients. In the second year of the demonstration, the amount of follow-up services that assistants could provide diminished as the FACES caseload grew.

The FACES program was intentionally marketed to seniors as a service for accessing more than just the FSP. This approach was based in part on the assumptions that (1) seniors often are more concerned about medical and prescription drug costs than food, and (2) due to stigma, seniors would be less willing to work with a program principally focused on the FSP. The application assistants helped more than 200 clients enroll in the state's Medicare buy-in program, and more than 100 clients enroll in the state's pharmaceutical assistance

(continued)

Assistance Program, Meals on Wheels, Farm Share, transportation assistance, Health Watch (medical alert program), the Telephone Lifeline Program (phone bill subsidy), hearing benefits, The Right Information and Direction (or TRIAD, a safety, crime prevention, and victim assistance initiative for seniors), emergency energy assistance, and food pantries.

program. The majority of clients that used FACES applied for food stamps, either alone or in conjunction with other programs. However, in some instances, the application assistants helped clients who were not interested in the FSP (or were already enrolled) to apply for other programs.

Three application assistants were employed as part of the FACES program. All three were low-income seniors hired through the Senior Community Service Employment Program and who worked 20 hours per week for the FACES program. As in Arizona, the use of seniors as application assistants working with other seniors was intended to help applicants feel more comfortable. In fact, the FACES program motto was “Seniors Helping Seniors.”

While the design of the FACES application assistance demonstration was similar to that of the FANS demonstration in Arizona, the implementation of the demonstration differed substantially. Key differences were that the FACES program provided in-home assistance, used fewer application assistants, and provided application assistance for a host of programs. Arizona’s FANS program, on the other hand, provided assistance primarily in public spaces, provided referrals to other programs (but usually not application assistance). While both programs used broad outreach efforts to identify potential clients, the FACES program in Maine also identified potential clients through door-to-door efforts.

Seniors not using the FACES program would have to take many more steps to apply for food stamps. They can obtain FSP applications from the DHS office (located in a separate county), either in person, or by telephone. Applications also are available at hospitals, doctor’s offices, and the local AAA. Over the past few years, Maine has attempted to simplify food stamp application procedures for the elderly (and other groups) by creating a shorter food stamp application with larger print, waiving the face-to-face eligibility interview for seniors, and creating specialized caseworker positions for those applicants seeking multiple benefits (such as Medicare/Medicaid). After the initial processing of the application, caseworkers call the clients to notify them of any outstanding paperwork (for example, prescription receipts) and schedule an eligibility interview. Staff use DHS databases to confirm Social Security and Supplemental Security income, and most interviews last 10 to 15 minutes. About one-fifth of all enrollees apply on a walk-in basis, frequently meeting with a caseworker the same day.

Outreach Activities

A central component of the FACES outreach strategy was door-to-door canvassing. Application assistants conducted what many involved in the demonstration likened to a grassroots political campaign, going door to door and speaking to seniors one at a time. Using names obtained from DHS, initial efforts were focused on contacting seniors who received SSI but not food stamps. The program coordinator also obtained voter lists from the town clerks throughout the county. While some residents would not qualify, these lists provided the most current data by home address and age group.

After the demonstration was operational for several months, word-of-mouth became a critical means of attracting interested seniors. The program coordinator estimated that by the second year of the demonstration, 60 percent of clients came through referrals and 40 percent through canvassing.

To promote the FACES program, the program coordinator also networked extensively with other local agencies serving low-income seniors. Other outreach activities included a public service announcement that aired on local television, numerous presentations to community groups, press releases and media coverage, brochures, and posters. Additionally, a website was developed that contained a copy of the FSP application along with other promotional materials.

During home visits, the assistants emphasized three main themes. First, they introduced the demonstration as “Seniors Helping Seniors.” The message was easy to comprehend, and capitalized on the notion that the elderly were more comfortable dealing with peers as opposed to government workers. Second, they underscored the importance of being able to “Stretch Your Food Dollars” by participating in the demonstration. They mentioned food stamps as little as possible due to the stigma that the elderly often attach to DHS and public assistance. Third, they spoke about how good nutrition contributes to good health.

Challenging Issues and Effective Strategies

The FACES program faced few major challenges in providing application assistance. The key difficulties that did arise concerned the management of elderly individuals as application assistants. First, some assistants had trouble retaining information about the various public assistance programs and eligibility rules, so weekly technical assistance sessions and mentoring were employed to help them remember key details. Moreover, because of these issues, the project coordinator felt compelled to carefully review each application before it was submitted to DHS. Second, using elderly application assistants was a challenge because of their frequent absences. In the two-year demonstration, each of the three assistants took extended sick leave at least once, due to personal health reasons. At times, this hampered the demonstration’s ability to provide services.

Despite these problems, the success of the FACES demonstration was widely attributed to the skills and dedication of its staff. The coordinator and assistants were cited by community stakeholders and clients as personable and very effective at connecting with seniors. They were clearly invested in the demonstration and willing to develop innovative approaches to reach more potential clients.

Another key to the demonstration’s success was the option to provide access to multiple programs. As discussed in Chapter IV, clients were extremely appreciative of access to other types of food assistance, but especially were appreciative of access to medical benefits. Participation levels might have increased less if the FACES program had provided application assistance to the FSP only.

MICHIGAN: MICHIGAN'S COORDINATED ACCESS TO FOOD FOR THE ELDERLY (MiCAFE)

Summary: Michigan's Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly (MiCAFE)

Dates of Operation	November 2002 to January 2005
Demonstration Model	Application Assistance
Grantee	Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA)
Other Major Partners	Elder Law of Michigan, Inc. (ELM)
Location	Genesee County
Eligibility	FSP-eligible households with one or more seniors

MiCAFE application assistants helped seniors apply for food stamps at senior centers and other facilities frequented by the elderly. Sites were equipped with computers and access to an on-line FSP application which was developed for the demonstration. Assistants were volunteers—often senior center staff—who worked scheduled times at the various sites. Assistants reviewed the FSP application with clients and entered their information into the on-line application. The applications were printed and submitted in hard copy to the FIA office on behalf of applicants. A toll-free call center was developed to answer assistants' questions about food stamp policies or the on-line application.

Michigan's Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly (MiCAFE) provided application assistance to seniors at sites such as senior centers or senior housing complexes. The Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA) administered the demonstration, and day-to-day operations were managed under a subcontract to FIA by Elder Law of Michigan, Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides legal counseling services over the phone for low-income seniors throughout the state. The demonstration was implemented in Genesee County, which includes the city of Flint. The MiCAFE program featured an electronic FSP application developed as part of the demonstration.

Operational Details

Under the demonstration, MiCAFE volunteers provided application assistance to seniors at locations throughout the county. The MiCAFE sites were places frequented by seniors, including senior centers and senior housing complexes. The number of MiCAFE sites in Genesee County increased during the course of the demonstration from 7 to 22.¹⁰ Available hours for assistance and scheduling strategies varied from site to site; some only

¹⁰ Initially, there were 9 MiCAFE sites, however two sites were closed early in the demonstration.

scheduled appointments, some provided walk-in help and scheduled assistance during certain times of the week, and some provided services whenever the sites normally operated.

During an assistance session, the application assistant worked through the entire application with the client. The application assistant entered the client's information into an on-line application that had been developed as part of the demonstration, and answered any questions the client may have had. Once intake was completed, the assistant then printed out the application for the senior to sign, photocopied the verification documentation, and hand-delivered or mailed the application packet to the FSP office. If the applicant did not bring the necessary documentation to the session, the application assistant gave the senior a personalized verification checklist detailing the items that needed to be sent to the FIA office within 10 business days. (Clients were given a list of documentation requirements when they scheduled their appointments, and most clients brought all necessary documentation to the assistance session.) Because the FSP eligibility interview was waived for MiCAFE applicants, the applicant would only be contacted by an FIA caseworker if there were questions about the application. Fewer than half of all MiCAFE applications required some degree of follow-up by the caseworker, and these usually were resolved with a quick telephone call. The most common reason for an incomplete application was that the client still needed to collect paperwork outlined on the MiCAFE verification checklist.

After the FSP application portion of the assistance session, the application assistant explored whether there were other nutrition and social services besides food stamps for which the senior might be eligible. The computer system included a section that screened seniors as to whether they needed congregate or home-delivered meal programs. Depending on the answers to these questions, the computer automatically displayed a list of nearby congregate meal sites, home-delivered meal programs, service providers who do assessments for nutritional counseling, and other resources.

The application assistance sessions typically occurred in a private setting at the MiCAFE site, such as an office or a computer lab. Completing the electronic application usually took between 20 and 70 minutes, depending on the technical aptitude of the assistant, the speed of the Internet connection, the complexity of the applicant household, and the extent of informal conversations between the application assistant and client. To help reduce delays in processing applications, the demonstration operated a call center that was used by application assistants whenever they had questions about FSP eligibility rules or needed technical assistance with the on-line application. The on-line nature of the application allowed call center staff to view the application in progress as they fielded the assistants' questions.

Unlike the Arizona and Maine demonstrations, which used paid SCSEP workers as application assistants, the MiCAFE application assistants were volunteers. In the second year of the demonstration, 38 volunteers were used, most of whom were already working (as paid staff or volunteers) at the MiCAFE site. As with the other demonstrations, however, many of the MiCAFE assistants were about the same age as many of the seniors they were assisting. These volunteers typically worked two hours per week as application assistants for the MiCAFE project.

Seniors applying for food stamps without MiCAFE request an application from FIA via mail, phone, proxy or in-person (Michigan uses a common application for all state programs). After submitting the application, seniors must complete a face-to-face eligibility interview with an FIA caseworker. Seniors often go to the FIA office in person and complete an application in the waiting room, which makes it easy to ask a clerk or caseworker for help. Those applicants who choose to complete the eligibility interview that same day may wait for one to two hours if staff are particularly busy.

Outreach Activities

Written materials and community presentations were the central components of the MiCAFE outreach strategy. MiCAFE distributed promotional brochures, postcards, and posters to senior centers, food banks, community centers, churches, pharmacies, soup kitchens, grocery stores, county health departments, and public buses. Staff also sent promotional items to seniors enrolled in a Meals on Wheels program, a prescription drug program, and a farmers' market program. MiCAFE staff made numerous presentations about the program to groups of seniors and to community officials throughout the county. Finally, the demonstration used press releases and media coverage to help spread the word about the program.

Challenging Issues and Effective Strategies

The principal challenge facing the MiCAFE demonstration was reaching the city of Flint, where much of the county's low-income elderly population lives. As conceived, the demonstration was to begin operating in nine sites; others would be added within the first two years. Two of the original nine were intended to serve downtown Flint, but they were closed by the city shortly after the start of the demonstration. One of these sites—the Hasselbring Senior Center—provided a host of services and had the potential to expose a large number of seniors to the MiCAFE program.¹¹ Although a replacement site in downtown Flint was soon identified, the location was less accessible to the elderly community. As a result, limited services were provided in downtown Flint during the first seven months of the demonstration.

After seven months, additional sites were identified. Two were serving downtown Flint, giving that portion of the city three sites by the end of the first year. By the end of the second year, another two sites were established in downtown Flint, bringing the total to five sites. Sites were also added throughout Genesee County so that by the end of the 21-month evaluation period, the MiCAFE demonstration grew from 7 to 22 sites.¹² This achievement notwithstanding, the demonstration's effectiveness might have been different if all 22 sites had been operating from the start.

¹¹ The Hasselbring site eventually reopened (and became a MiCAFE site), but provided only a limited array of services to seniors.

¹² Seven sites were added three months before the evaluation period ended.

One successful aspect of the demonstration was the accessibility of the interactive, on-line application. Most application assistants found the application easy to use, and this helped streamline the application process. While FIA could not accept FSP applications electronically, the fact that the application was Internet-based was nevertheless advantageous, since it facilitated technical assistance between application assistants and the MiCAFE call center.

FIA caseworkers indicated that the MiCAFE demonstration saved time for them for two reasons. First, the caseworkers did not need to conduct an eligibility interview with MiCAFE applicants, saving about 30 minutes per application. Second, they felt that the MiCAFE applications tended to be more accurate than others, which saved caseworkers time because they did not have to conduct a lot of follow-up communication with seniors to collect additional verification documentation, nor did they need to redo portions of the applications. They also observed that the demonstration did not create a workload burden, nor did it significantly alter their job responsibilities.

As in Maine, many clients indicated that the MiCAFE program staff performed very effectively. Volunteers were reported to be consistently responsive, helpful, and accommodating to applicants. The Elder Law staff were adept at making connections within the community, managing the start-up process for new MiCAFE centers, and anticipating problems. These staffing issues played an important role in limiting the problems encountered by the demonstration.

CONNECTICUT: THE FOOD CONNECTION (TFC)

Summary: Connecticut's 'The Food Connection' (TFC)

Dates of Operation	November 2002 to October 2004
Demonstration Model	Commodity Alternative Benefit
Grantee	Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS)
Other Major Partners	Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT)
Location	10 towns in the Hartford Region
Eligibility	Pure elderly households

Under the TFC program, eligible seniors could elect to receive commodity packages in lieu of traditional food stamps. Clients could select from among the regular, Latino, and Meals on Wheels packages that contained a variety of non-perishable items as well as butter and cheese. To reduce the weight of the packages, the monthly commodities were split into two packages that were distributed during two separate weeks (instead of once a month). Clients picked up packages at one of several sites throughout the region. Some clients were eligible for home delivery.

The Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) was one of two grantees that selected the commodity alternative benefit model to increase elderly participation in the FSP. Clients electing to participate in The Food Connection (TFC) received commodity packages twice a month in lieu of traditional food stamp benefits. The contents of the packages would have cost between \$60 and \$70 if clients had purchased them in local stores. DSS contracted with the Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT) to coordinate commodity storage and distribution. The demonstration was available to residents of 10 towns in the Hartford region. The demonstration was designed in this way so that the remaining nine towns in the Hartford region could be used as a comparison group.

Operational Details

Under the demonstration, seniors applied for food stamps through the standard procedures—by submitting an application to the DSS and participating in an eligibility interview. If eligible for food stamps, seniors could elect to participate in the demonstration and receive commodities instead of benefits on their EBT card.

Seniors who elected to enroll in TFC could choose among three types of packages: regular, Latino, and Meals on Wheels (MOW).¹³ The Latino package was geared to the cooking and eating habits of people with an Hispanic background, while the MOW option was intended to supplement the hot meals received by those clients by providing breakfast items and healthy snacks. Each commodity option had four “food baskets;” one basket was distributed every two weeks, with the complete menu pattern cycling every two months. The packages were designed by a nutritionist to meet USDA guidelines.

Seniors picked up packages on assigned weekdays from mid-morning through early afternoon. They could arrange for a proxy to pick up packages as long as CRT was notified in advance. Each package, or “food basket,” was contained in two sturdy canvas bags. Every time clients picked up packages, they returned the empty canvas bags from the previous pickup.

Commodities, stored and assembled daily at CRT’s warehouse, were distributed at 16 sites across the Hartford region. On each distribution day, the CRT driver typically went to 2 of the 16 sites, often distributing packages to seniors from the back of the delivery van and leaving at the center any packages not picked up during the distribution time. If necessary, the driver could help seniors load groceries into their cars. The driver then returned to the site later in the day to retrieve any packages that had not been picked up. For TFC clients and those in CRT’s Meals on Wheels program, CRT delivered packages along with hot meals twice a month.

¹³ Appendix A contains a list of the contents of TFC packages.

The commodities in the bi-weekly distribution weighed close to 50 pounds (each canvas bag weighed 20 to 30 pounds.) The amount of food in the packages was dictated in part by USDA's cost guidelines for the demonstrations. The amount that the demonstration paid for each package—including the costs of food as well as shipping and storage costs—could not exceed the average benefit to seniors of \$43 in the first year of the demonstration and \$46 in the second year. However, the cost to the demonstration of these commodities was substantially less than the comparable retail price. It would have cost participants over \$60 to purchase a month's worth of commodities at the local supermarket.

CRT ordered commodities from USDA three months in advance; one order would typically last approximately six months. Because some commodities might not be available from USDA, there was usually uncertainty as to exactly what commodities would be received by the demonstration, making it difficult to plan future orders.

In addition, CRT had to change its warehouse somewhat in order to accommodate the demonstration. For instance, industrial refrigerators were installed to store perishable foods such as butter and cheese, and a security fence was built to separate the commodities from the remainder of the warehouse.

Outreach Strategies

Program officials envisioned a two-pronged approach for reaching seniors. Intake workers at the regional offices would inform new applicants and seniors up for recertification about the demonstration, while an outreach coordinator would focus on public education efforts. Both approaches, however, had limited effectiveness.

Initially, caseworkers served as the primary vehicle for publicizing the demonstration, because the outreach coordinator needed to assist with food distribution until operations stabilized. Caseworkers, however, did not consistently promote TFC. Caseworkers in the Hartford region generally felt overworked by their existing responsibilities.¹⁴ By their own accounts, the caseworkers did not take steps to promote TFC simply because that would have entailed more work. In particular, they stopped including TFC promotional materials along with food stamp applications when applications were requested by elderly clients. By the second year of the demonstration, they rarely informed clients of the commodities option during the eligibility interview.

The outreach coordinator from CRT launched an active public education campaign by distributing written materials and making community presentations. These efforts began about five months into the demonstration. The impact from these efforts seemed to have been limited. Despite the fact that seniors expressed interest in TFC during community presentations, few seniors followed through and applied for food stamps (or if they did, they did not request TFC in the process).

¹⁴ Statewide caseworker layoffs and cutbacks occurred around the same time that the demonstration started, and this resulted in larger caseloads for remaining caseworkers.

In addition to these efforts, DSS sent a special mailing to active FSP clients announcing the alternative commodity benefit option; this included a sign-up form that seniors could fill out and return. The mailing, which occurred at the start of the demonstration, was sent to approximately 3,600 seniors. This mailing may have been one of the more effective outreach efforts, because many of the 184 clients enrolled in the first month of the demonstration were ongoing FSP clients who converted to TFC benefits.

When describing The Food Connection to potential food stamp applicants, CRT staff usually focused on the higher net gain in benefits that many seniors could expect from commodities as opposed to an EBT card. A common tactic used by caseworkers was to ask seniors who only qualified for the minimum food stamp benefit level, “How many grocery items can you buy for \$10?”¹⁵ CRT also emphasized the variety of food items that clients would receive, as well as their choice between the three package types.

Challenges

Connecticut’s TFC demonstration faced numerous challenges. First, staff needed to develop a system to order, warehouse, assemble, and distribute the commodity packages. The system was complicated by numerous factors: (1) packages were distributed twice a month at 16 separate sites and to some Meals on Wheels clients, (2) variations such as the “Latino package” were offered, and (3) commodities needed to be ordered well in advance of distribution. Although the CRT developed a system to handle these logistics, the process was labor intensive, time consuming, and in the initial months of the demonstration, required significant oversight to refine.

Partly because of the complex nature of the distribution system, participating in the demonstration proved to be frustrating for some clients. For instance, transporting the two heavy canvas bags was difficult, especially for seniors who walked or used public transportation to the distribution center. The bags typically weighed between 20 and 30 pounds each. Moreover, the narrow window within which commodities could be picked up was inconvenient. Additionally, in the first months of the demonstration, there was confusion over where clients should go to get their commodity packages. Relative to the other commodity alternative benefit demonstration in North Carolina, the TFC demonstration was less service-oriented.

Promoting the TFC program was made difficult by three main challenges. Mass media, the obvious tool for reaching seniors, was rendered useless because any television, radio, or newspaper announcements would, by definition, reach the entire Hartford population, and staff did not want to promote the program among seniors who lived in towns that did not qualify for the demonstration. Additionally, an early promotional mailing from CRT that

¹⁵ Staff did not promote the higher retail value of the commodities (as was done in North Carolina), in part because USDA requested commodity demonstrations not use the higher value as a promotional tool.

included a sign-up form gave no instructions for seniors as to where to return the form. Moreover, as discussed above, eligibility workers in the local DSS offices were reluctant to discuss the demonstration with elderly FSP applicants. Had the eligibility workers promoted the demonstration to applicants more consistently, enrollment may have increased, sowing the seed for word-of-mouth publicity, which often succeeds where other outreach efforts fail.

NORTH CAROLINA: COMMODITY ALTERNATIVE BENEFIT (CAB)

Summary: North Carolina's Commodity Alternative Benefit (CAB)

Dates of Operation	November 2002 to September 2005
Demonstration Model	Commodity Alternative Benefit
Grantee	North Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS)
Other Major Partners	Alamance County Community Services Agency (ACCSA) Vocational Trades of Alamance (VTA)
Location	Alamance County
Eligibility	Pure elderly households

Under the CAB program, eligible seniors could elect to receive commodity packages in lieu of traditional food stamps. The packages contained varying combinations of canned goods, butter, cheese, and frozen meat and poultry. Food distribution occurred monthly, with most clients—or other individuals acting on a client's behalf—picking up the food bags at a community service provider's warehouse. Program staff also delivered packages at home to the approximately one-third of demonstration participants who could not make arrangements for pickup at the central distribution location.

The North Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) was the other grantee implementing the commodity alternative benefit demonstration model. The demonstration served seniors in Alamance County, a rural county including the town of Burlington and located northwest of Raleigh. The monthly CAB commodity package contained goods that would have cost more than \$70 if purchased in a local store. The Alamance County Community Service Agency (ACCSA) managed the demonstration. A second key partner in the demonstration was the Vocational Trades of Alamance (VTA), a nonprofit rehabilitation agency that gives employment opportunities and services to mentally- and physically-challenged adults. VTA housed the commodities and each month, VTA workers (adults with disabilities) packaged the commodities into grocery bags and placed the bags into clients' cars.

Operational Details

Similar to Connecticut, under North Carolina's CAB program, seniors applied for food stamps through the standard procedures in the county—by submitting an application to the DSS and participating in an eligibility interview with a caseworker. If eligible for food stamps, seniors could elect to participate in the demonstration and receive a commodity package each month. During the eligibility interview, seniors were informed of the package contents and were given an estimate of the cost to buy those same items at a grocery store.

CAB participants picked up their commodity packages at VTA's warehouse in downtown Burlington on the third Tuesday and Wednesday of each month.¹⁶ Clients drove to the VTA receiving dock, where VTA workers loaded the food into vehicles. The weight of food bags was not an issue since VTA staff loaded the packages into seniors' cars, and because seniors often had a friend or relative assisting them. If seniors missed a pickup, they could make arrangements with VTA to come on a non-designated food distribution day.

Home delivery was available to those clients who could not easily access the warehouse. While program staff did not advertise this service, they often approved home delivery if a senior inquired about it. ACCSA estimated that approximately one-third of all demonstration clients took advantage of this service. Common delivery locations tended to be in more rural and remote areas, as well as in senior housing complexes. A van was equipped with portable coolers to safely transport frozen food items.

Seniors received one of two food package variations each month. These packages differed slightly in terms of items and/or quantities (for example, two versus three cans of pears, or one can of tuna versus no tuna).¹⁷ Each monthly package consisted of six bags; the larger numbers of bags reduced the weight of any individual bag, and this made carrying the food deliveries easier for the elderly. Five bags contained canned foods and one bag contained butter, cheese, and frozen meat and poultry. Together, the six bags weighed between 72 and 75 pounds. It would have cost participants about \$70 to purchase the contents in either of these packages at a local supermarket.¹⁸

As in Connecticut, the North Carolina demonstration needed a complex system for receiving, sorting, storing, and assembling food at its warehouse. Food orders to USDA were placed two months in advance of delivery. In the initial stages of the demonstration, demonstration staff had USDA commodities delivered every month. However, this required

¹⁶ Program staff estimated that approximately 30 percent of commodity pickups were received by the client alone, 30 percent by the client accompanied by a friend or relative, and 40 percent by a designated representative of the client.

¹⁷ Appendix A contains a list of the contents of CAB commodity packages.

¹⁸ The per-client cost to the demonstration of the commodities—including shipping and storage—could not exceed the average benefit to seniors in Alamance County—\$38 in the first year of the demonstration and \$39 in the second year.

substantial planning since every item was not available each month, and orders needed to ensure sufficient quantities of each item until that item could be ordered again. Eventually, demonstration staff placed larger food orders, and had them delivered once every other month, reducing the work needed to schedule the orders. Once food was delivered, VTA staff spent several days unloading food, storing it and assembling food packages. A portion of the VTA warehouse was dedicated to the demonstration, and refrigerators and freezers were installed for the perishable food items. Occasionally, demonstration staff needed additional freezer space and used freezer space at a local school to store surplus frozen foods.

Outreach Strategies

Outreach for the CAB demonstration primarily involved presentations to community organizations. Because Alamance County has a small population and yet has a centrally-located town, it was easy to reach a large portion of the low-income elderly by making presentations in various senior centers, church groups, and apartment complexes. During these presentations, demonstration staff explained the CAB procedures and encouraged seniors to enroll in the FSP. Additionally, posters and fliers explaining the demonstration were distributed to many of the same organizations.

To give all seniors enrolled in the FSP the opportunity to participate in the demonstration, DSS mailed letters explaining the demonstration to elderly households already enrolled in the FSP. This led to a large initial enrollment, as many households converted to the CAB program.

Program officials did not find outreach through the media to be particularly effective. Some seniors who lived in the more rural, remote regions of Alamance County did not subscribe to the local newspaper. Moreover, not all seniors subscribed to cable television, the outlet for public service announcements. So, after an initial wave of brochures, television segments, and newspaper articles during the first several months of the demonstration, staff used community presentations as the primary means of educating the public about the demonstration. Most of these presentations were handled by the project coordinator, who appeared to communicate very effectively with elderly clients.

DSS caseworkers also played an important role in promoting the demonstration. During the eligibility interview (either for new applicants or recertifying households), it was the caseworker's responsibility to explain the availability of the CAB program and how it operated. Caseworkers in Alamance County routinely promoted the demonstration when talking with seniors. Caseworkers typically offered the commodity benefit option only to those seniors who qualified for less than \$70 in food stamp benefits. Some caseworkers also tried informally to screen out seniors who did not seem to be viable candidates by asking questions about their cooking habits, and screening out households that typically did not prepare their own meals.

The experience with caseworkers promoting the demonstration in Alamance County differed substantially from the experience in Connecticut, where caseworkers often did not inform clients about the demonstration. A key reason for this difference was that staff from the Alamance County DSS office played a central role in designing the demonstration and, as a result, office staff were invested in the outcome. Additionally, the Alamance County DSS office was relatively small, and caseworkers could easily be kept abreast of the demonstration rules and procedures. In Connecticut, on the other hand, the demonstration was designed primarily by state staff, and the large local offices made communication with caseworkers more complicated.

Challenging Issues and Effective Strategies

Few of the challenges faced by the CAB program appeared to affect service delivery to clients.¹⁹ Probably the biggest challenge in that respect was reaching elderly clients in the most rural, outlying areas of the county. Most CAB clients resided in or close to Burlington, the main town in Alamance County, making the program accessible to them. Demonstration staff recognized that the existing outreach efforts were not successfully reaching the seniors in the outlying areas, but were unable to identify an effective alternative. At the project's inception, staff had intended to create distribution outposts outside of Burlington to facilitate package pickup for clients in the most rural areas, but there were never enough CAB clients in these areas.

The commodity distribution process was clearly a successful aspect of the demonstration. Package pickup was simple for clients. Most had little trouble arranging transportation, and those who did easily made adjustments—either picking up on a different day or receiving home delivery. The process of assembling and distributing the packages was well organized and operated smoothly—most likely because the VTA, which managed the process, had experience in product assembly and storage.

As with the other pilot sites, the skills and judgment of demonstration staff was credited with much of the demonstration's success. ACCSA and VTA staff, working with DSS, designed a demonstration process that was user-friendly to clients. Indeed, staff called each new enrollee before their first package pickup to ensure that they were comfortable with the procedures, and sent notices reminding clients about pick up dates. Moreover, the process of picking up packages was well organized, and demonstration staff were pleasant to clients. ACCSA staff also effectively promoted the demonstration through community presentations.

¹⁹ One major challenge of the CAB demonstration occurred prior to initiation of service delivery. The original agency recruited to store and distribute the commodities backed out of the demonstration. This delayed the start of the demonstration and affected its costs. See Nogales et al. (2005) for details.